

State of  
Washington  
House of  
Representatives



## COVID-19 Session Operations Plan

### **I. OVERVIEW**

The Washington State House of Representatives (House) is committed to doing the people's work while adhering to public health guidance to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 during the ongoing pandemic. This document provides guidelines for House operations during the 2021 legislative session.

The following imperatives guided the development of this document:

- Ensuring accountable and transparent operations of the House;
- Preserving and enhancing public participation;
- Adhering to the guidance of medical and public health officials; and
- Protecting the health and safety of the public, House members, and employees.

This document relies on the latest guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), local public health authorities, the Department of Labor and Industries (L&I), the Department of Health (DOH), and the Governor's Office. Changes will be communicated as we receive new information or guidance.

### **II. SESSION OPERATIONS**

In order to preserve public health, House facilities will remain closed and, subject to the adoption of House rules, proceedings will occur remotely during the 2021 session. Unfortunately, allowing access to House facilities during the 2021 legislative session carries a risk of infection, not only within the legislative community, but also within communities across the entire state. However, operational changes will be implemented to enable and enhance public participation, including remote participation and alternative ways to contact a Member's office. Additionally, all committee meetings and floor action will be streamed on TVW.

#### **Floor Sessions**

The first day of the legislative session will require an in-person quorum to vote on House rules. This will be held at a Thurston county facility large enough to accommodate all House members and maintain physical distancing. The members will be sworn in and sign their oath of office during opening day proceedings. The press may observe the proceedings, but no guests will be permitted on site. Opening day will be broadcast to TVW. Anyone attending must self-screen prior to entry in the facility, wear a mask, and socially distance themselves from others.

Following opening day and the adoption of House rules regulating remote voting, floor sessions will be held remotely. Members will participate in floor sessions through a secure voting system. Additionally, members must be seen through a video link in order to vote or speak. Members will be required to follow

House dress code and decorum rules while participating remotely. The presiding officers, minority leader, and caucus floor leaders will be permitted on the floor. Members who are permitted access to House facilities may not meet with the public, stakeholders, or lobbyists in House facilities.

The galleries will remain closed to the public. Up to six credentialed members of the Capitol Press Corps are permitted to observe floor action from the House gallery. The press must adhere to all public health guidance, including wearing masks and social distancing, self-screen, and sign in and out of the gallery.

### **Committee Operations**

Given the public health risk associated with large gatherings and close proximity during the ongoing pandemic, committee meetings will be held remotely via Zoom in accordance with House rules. The House is committed to facilitating public participation. The public will have the ability to testify directly from their community, rather than traveling to the Capitol to testify.

The legislative website will provide information regarding how the public can participate, including addressing accessibility for individuals with disabilities. The public can sign up to provide testimony over the virtual platform once a bill is scheduled for public hearing. The sign-up will close one hour prior to the start of the meeting. Those testifying will be provided an individual Zoom link in order to participate. The Chairs will continue to decide the order and length of the public testimony. Additionally, there will be a process to accept written testimony for bills scheduled for public hearing.

### **Processes**

Members will participate remotely from their homes or from their legislative district offices. Additionally, members are permitted to secure temporary spaces in their community for their remote participation. This might involve partnering with cities, counties, or community and technical colleges to secure short-term space with stable internet connectivity in order to facilitate remote participation. Caucus meetings will be conducted remotely via Microsoft Teams. Information regarding contacting a member's office will be accessible on the House public website.

Each caucus may designate up to 15 members to work remotely from their assigned offices on the capitol campus (see Part IV Expectations for House Operations). The Executive Rules Committee will determine whether other members are permitted to use their office at the Capitol Campus to participate remotely due to connectivity issues. Members who are permitted access to House facilities may only participate remotely and may not meet with the public, stakeholders, or lobbyists in House facilities. Meetings with staff must occur remotely. Members must self-screen prior to entering the facilities, wear a mask anytime they are in public spaces or anytime they are not alone, including within their own office, and maintain at least 6 feet of distance from others.

All workroom documents will be accepted electronically. A blue sheet or green sheet must be dropped in the eHopper by the member via email. All floor amendments must be submitted electronically, rather than dropped on the bar. There will be a Member Portal that includes FAQs about processes and links to forms.

The House Page Program is suspended during the 2021 legislative session. The Legislative Intern Program will be conducted virtually.

### **III. PREPARATION FOR SESSION OPERATIONS**

Continued changes in House operations are necessary to keep members and staff safe and prevent the spread of COVID-19. Some of these changes may be inconvenient and unfamiliar, but it should be remembered that this is being done to protect the legislative community and those that interact with it. Anyone who has questions or concerns is encouraged to contact the Chief Clerk's Office or House Counsel.

House facilities on the Capitol Campus will remain closed to the public and guests. Only members and staff who are granted an exception and provided prior approval will be able to access House facilities. For the few individuals authorized to be on the Capitol Campus, the following applies:

1. Staff and members must self-screen prior to entering any House facility and provide an attestation that they have not answered "yes" to any of the screening questions. [See House Screening Questionnaire.]
2. As required by Thurston County<sup>1</sup> and the Safe Start Plan,<sup>2</sup> everyone must wear a mask when interacting in person with anyone else or while in public settings such as common areas and hallways. Masks must be worn properly over one's nose and mouth and secure under one's chin.<sup>3</sup> While masks are not required to be worn if an individual is working onsite alone in an enclosed work area, if anyone else enters the work area, all individuals must wear a mask.
3. Exceptions to this mask wearing requirement may be made if an individual is deaf or hard of hearing, or is communicating with someone who relies on language cues such as facial markers and expression and mouth movements as a part of communication; or if an individual has a medical condition or disability that makes wearing a mask inappropriate. Please contact the House ADA coordinator, [Kyle Overmiller](#), if you need an accommodation regarding masks.
4. Six-foot distancing must be maintained in all spaces, at all times. People must disperse if a situation arises that makes adequate distancing impossible.

House Administration, in collaboration with others, continue to take the following steps in preparation for session:

House Counsel provides:

- Assistance and advice to employees and management with issues related to work conditions and building access, including information for staff regarding accommodations, leave options, and work with local public health authorities in the event of exposure.

House Administration, in collaboration with others, will support remote work by:

- Deploying equipment (monitors, printers, headsets) to support remote work to staff.
- Adjusting leave practices to allow more flexible use during session.

For staff and members who are permitted House facility access, House Administration, in collaboration with others, will:

- Ensure availability and proper placement of sanitizing materials (e.g., wipes and hand sanitizer), protective equipment, tissues, and wastebaskets.
- Provide signage, reconfigure spaces to reinforce safe practices including installing physical barriers, increase disinfecting, and change HVAC filters.
- Address accessibility needs and requests for accommodations.

#### **IV. EXPECTATIONS FOR HOUSE OPERATIONS**

Staff and members will be asked to join in efforts to keep each other safe by reducing the likelihood for transmission of COVID-19. These include the following:

1. Each caucus may designate up to fifteen members to work remotely from their assigned office on the capitol campus. Members with unresolved technological issues will be prioritized for such access. All other members will participate remotely. Members permitted access to their assigned legislative offices must comply with public health guidelines (masking, distancing, hygiene) both on and off the capitol campus, and acknowledge that House facilities will remain closed to the public.
2. The House Executive Rules Committee may authorize additional members with internet connectivity challenges to participate remotely from their office on campus if the number of members with unresolved technological issues exceeds the original allotment and the technological issues are substantiated, attempts to address them do not bring resolution, and a site closer to the member's district is not available.
3. Only members of Leadership authorized for floor proceedings will be permitted access to the House chamber.
4. Staff must plan to telework during the 2021 session. House staff authorized to work onsite during Phase 3 are not automatically permitted to continue during session. Staff supporting committee or floor proceedings may be permitted access during those times. Staff directors must submit a staffing plan to the Chief Clerk's Office for approval for any staff seeking to work onsite. This plan should consider how many staff or members would be present at a given time to ensure that ample social distancing is able to be maintained. A plan is needed for any staff that would spend any time working onsite at the Capitol Campus or at a district office.
5. Member meetings with legislative staff must be scheduled remotely, irrespective of where the member is working from. Additionally, members and legislative assistants may not be co-located.
6. If a member or an employee in an "at-risk" category is in need of a work accommodation (including a need to access a building facility or a need to continue to telework when they would otherwise be directed to work in a building facility) they must notify their supervisor and/or the House ADA coordinator, [Kyle Overmiller](#). At risk categories include individuals with asthma, chronic lung disease, diabetes, serious heart conditions, chronic kidney disease being treated with dialysis, severe obesity, people aged 65 years and older, immunocompromised, and liver disease.<sup>4</sup>
7. Staff work-related travel remains limited to essential business and requires advance approval.
8. Office supplies should be requested by email through Legislative Support Services and can be picked up at designated times or mailed.
9. Additional equipment such as printers, monitors, and headsets are available in order to facilitate remote work.
10. In-person LegTech/LSC assistance will be limited. Whenever possible, LegTech/LSC assistance will be provided remotely. If in-person assistance is needed, public health guidance regarding physical distancing and mask wearing must be followed.
11. Meetings must be virtual. In-person meetings are not permitted unless unavoidable due to exceptional circumstances.
12. Most importantly, anyone who is sick should plan to stay home and help prevent the spread of illness. Before entering House facilities for any purpose, individuals must self-screen using public health criteria and provide an attestation. [See House Screening attached].<sup>5</sup> Security will have touchless

thermometers for use.

13. Key cards will be turned off. All building access must be approved in advance through the House Executive Rules Committee for members and the Chief Clerk's Office for staff. Access must be coordinated with Security. The JLOB entry will be restricted to the entrance facing the sundial. Everyone must sign a log.
14. Individuals permitted access must wash their hands or use hand sanitizer immediately upon entry in the building.
15. A mask must be worn at all times, unless a person is working alone in their immediate workstation.<sup>6,7</sup> If a workstation does not have a door, such as a cubicle, a person must wear their mask anytime another person is working in the same area, including in a cubicle that shares an entry way.
16. The House will provide masks that adhere to L&I standards. All staff and members may obtain two cloth masks from Security. A person may opt to use their own cloth masks, but must adhere to decorum standards. Staff should follow public health guidance for the use and laundering of masks.<sup>8</sup>
17. Everyone must practice proper distancing (maintaining a minimum six feet of distance), respiratory etiquette, hand washing, and disinfecting of shared spaces (kitchen and copiers) after use.<sup>9</sup>
18. Communal rooms, such as breakrooms and the workout room remain closed.
19. Kitchen equipment and water dispensers will be available for use by one person at a time. Adequate distancing must be maintained.
20. Avanti Market services in JLOB will be paused. The Member Cafeteria operations are suspended.
21. Food sharing, communal meals, and consuming food in common/public areas is not permitted.
22. If anyone becomes ill with COVID-19 like symptoms during the workday, that person must immediately notify their supervisor and leave the building. They should not return to a House facility until cleared by a healthcare provider.
23. If anyone accesses a House facility, and later has or develops signs/symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, muscle aches or new loss of taste or smell) or is themselves found positive or has been in close contact with someone who is experiencing symptoms or is confirmed positive, they must report the development of symptoms, positive diagnosis, or close contact to the House Counsel and, if an employee, to the employee's staff director. Information must be provided to House Counsel on what areas they occupied and who they had close contact with, as defined by the CDC. Information will only be shared as appropriate and allowed by law. The House will also take steps to disinfect areas.
24. In the event someone becomes diagnosed with COVID-19 and accessed House facilities, the workspace will be disinfected according to CDC guidelines.<sup>10</sup>
25. Everyone must complete review the [materials](#) addressing coronavirus education and prevention of transmission.<sup>11</sup>

## **V. MOVING FORWARD**

The Chief Clerk's Office will continue to monitor the guidance from the Thurston County Public Health & Social Services, L&I, DOH, and the Governor's Office to determine how and when to adjust operations. This may also include returning to more restricted access of House facilities if staff or operations are compromised. The Chief Clerk's Office recognizes that these operational changes are unfamiliar and uncomfortable. Adjustment periods will be necessary. House member and staff diligence and flexibility are essential.

Thank you all for your assistance.

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<sup>1</sup> See, <https://www.thurstoncountywa.gov/phss/phssdocuments/ThurstonCOVID-19FAQsFaceCoveringsFinal5-29-20.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> See, [https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/SafeStartPhasedReopening.pdf?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=govdelivery](https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/SafeStartPhasedReopening.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)

<sup>3</sup> See: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/about-face-coverings.html>

<sup>4</sup> House staff who are in an “at-risk” category and according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) are at higher risk for severe illness. At risk categories include asthma, chronic lung disease, diabetes, serious heart conditions, chronic kidney disease being treated with dialysis, severe obesity, people aged 65 years and older, immunocompromised, and liver disease.

See, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-at-higher-risk.html>.

<sup>5</sup> See, <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/1600/coronavirus/Employervisitorscreeningguidance.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> See Page 5, [https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/SafeStartPhasedReopening.pdf?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=govdelivery](https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/SafeStartPhasedReopening.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)

<sup>7</sup> See Page 2, <https://www.thurstoncountywa.gov/phss/phssdocuments/ThurstonCOVID-19FAQsFaceCoveringsFinal5-29-20.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> See, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/how-to-wash-cloth-face-coverings.html>

<sup>9</sup> See, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cleaning-disinfection.html>

<sup>10</sup> See, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/disinfecting-building-facility.html>

<sup>11</sup> See, <https://www.lni.wa.gov/safety-health/safety-topics/topics/coronavirus>